

NAPA AT HOME

Sewing the fabric of her life

Napa At Home owner helps you decorate in high-end style



JUNE 07, 2013 8:05 PM • [ROSEMARIE KEMPTON](#)

It is difficult to discern when the love of fabric begins. Perhaps it starts when a toddler notices sheer curtains that seem to play as a summer breeze lifts and drops them.

Maybe it begins when a child first touches the green velvet cloth grandma is using to make a special dress.

Many, bitten at an impressionable age by the fabric bug, become quilters. Those who do not follow

grandma's example of quilting and sewing clothes for their family, still experience a lifetime yearning to be surrounded by all things woven.

Whether decorating their classroom or home, they seek to bring as many types of fabric as possible into the rooms in which they spend time.

One such fabric devotee is Deborah Macdonald. She operates Napa At Home, a business that supplies a curated collection of high-end, sophisticated "to the trade only" fabrics by the yard for all home decorating needs.

As a girl, Macdonald went to sleep dreaming of all the things she could design with fabric.

"I have designed clothes in my sleep for as long as I can remember, but was frustrated when I attempted to translate my vision onto paper as my drawing skills are limited," she said.

Believing she couldn't make it as a designer, Macdonald chose a career in law.

"I thought a great deal about designing and fabric while I was beginning a legal career. I longed for some kind of career with fabric, but my professional life took me in another direction," she said.

Macdonald often went to the library (in those days there was no Internet) on her personal time during the early days of her legal career to learn more about how fabric is made and sold. During the 25 years as a corporate attorney, Macdonald kept abreast of the fabric world through books, magazines, the Internet and having her own furniture reupholstered.

Her deep passion for fabric was rekindled on a visit to castles and stately country homes in France where she fell in love with fabric-covered walls after seeing tapestries. These tapestries, she explained, were used in pre-revolutionary French homes to insulate against the cold as well

as add beauty and privacy.

The impetus for starting a fabric business came from three insights, she said.

“Fabric more than any other element makes the difference between an ordinary chair, sofa, bedding, wall design or fabric screen and a heart-stopping one,” she said of her first insight.

Her second insight was that fabric-covered wall treatments are a distinct way to dramatically change a room.

Her third insight came while looking for sophisticated fabrics for home decorative use. “The most beautiful fabrics were simply inaccessible to most of us,” she said.

It was not easy get vendors for “trade only” fabrics used in upholstery. She began attending the fabric shows in High Point, N.C., where she observed the people who made couches, drapes and “everything else you could imagine.”

Most fabric vendors were selling full 50-yard rolls but Macdonald was finally able to obtain vendors who were willing to sell her smaller pieces.

Her fabric vendors include those who sell to well-known names such as Robert Allen and Kravet, she said. She can provide access to fabrics from Scalamandre to Brunschwig & Fils because she has developed a relationship with vendors who sell only to designers

Those who adore cloth for its beauty, versatility and feel — and probably have stashes of it hidden away in their homes — will appreciate Macdonald’s treasure. She has hundreds of fabric sample swatches from cotton and silk to heavy upholstery, suede, leather, sheers, denim, linen and more in her home.

She works collaboratively with clients and “loves the experience of finding the right fabric” for their project. Her fabrics and expertise are being used in homes, offices and restaurants around the valley.

Clients work with Macdonald on many projects. Some are choosing to have wall panels and custom upholstered room dividers made.

Whether tufted, flat or upholstered, wall panels can bring colors and patterns into a room.

Room dividers add accent to a room and can be made in any fabric. Custom-upholstered room dividers can be functional besides lending a chic and classy look to a room. They can be used to create an interesting look, screen off a work area, or mark off an area for privacy.

“The choice of fabric transcends the design — whether it is clothing or home décor, the materials one chooses can better transform the look into the creation and emotion you want to evoke,” she said.

Her own home is filled with fabric. Five different types of fabric, without counting the pillows, are represented in her living room. She’s had many furnishings reupholstered, and throughout her home fabric is used in a variety of charming ways as wall treatments and room dividers.

She has used a durable ultra-suede fabric on her dining room chairs but on the back — where a grandchild’s “sticky fingers” will be less likely to touch — a more delicate fabric portrays birds on

a vine.

“Durable doesn’t have to mean ugly,” she, laughed.

When looking for durable fabric for upholstery that is going to get a lot of use, Macdonald said to look for a measurement called “rubs.” The higher the rubs, the more durable it is. Look for anything 45,000 to 60,000 rubs or higher. Some of her fabric swatches are as high as 100,000 rubs. The content — polyester, linen, cotton, or wool — is less important than the rubs.

When selecting fabric, Macdonald suggests coordinating not only colors and patterns but sheens and textures of fabric as well. You could have a sensory overload in a room full of shiny chintz and silk if it is not tempered with enough matte fabrics or accessories.

“Pillows are a great way to change color in a room,” she said. “You can use an expensive fabric on them but it takes only a yard or two for a pillow so you don’t feel guilty.”

“The applications for fabric are endless — more than merely functional, they can be used to create a mood, be decorative, square off spaces and more,” she said. “Be open, experiment, enjoy the endless possibilities that using fabric in home décor present.”

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For more information, contact NapaAtHome.com or call 707-255-0248.